March 2024

Live Well, Work Well

The Benefits Resource

Understanding Your Kidney Health

March is National Kidney Month, making it a great time to take charge of your health by lowering your chances of developing kidney disease. Your kidneys filter your blood to remove waste and extra water to create urine. They also make vital hormones that produce red blood cells, promote bone health and regulate blood pressure. As such, the kidneys play a vital role in your body.

The National Kidney Foundation reports that 1 in 3 adults are at risk for life-threatening kidney disease, but most don't even know it.

Risk Factors

Kidney disease is a leading cause of death in the United States. Today, 15% of Americans are affected by kidney disease—and most won't have symptoms unless their kidneys fail. There are numerous physical signs of kidney disease, but most people attribute them to other conditions. If you have one of these risk factors, you may be at risk for kidney disease:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Excess weight
- Family history of kidney disease

Kidney-friendly Lifestyle Tips

Your kidneys work hard for you, so taking good care of them is essential. Consider these tips:

- **Get tested.** Regular screening for kidney damage or disease can allow you to keep track of your kidney's health and help prevent future damage.
- **Reduce over-the-counter drug usage.** Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g., ibuprofen) can cause kidney damage if taken regularly, so never exceed the recommended dosage.
- **Exercise regularly.** Exercising helps lower your blood pressure and boost heart health—both critical factors in preventing kidney damage. Focus on being active for at least 30 minutes a day.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Studies reveal that eating whole grains, nuts, fruits and vegetables is one of the best ways to keep kidneys healthy. A plant-based diet may also help prevent and treat kidney disease.
- **Drink plenty of fluids.** Water helps flush sodium and toxins from your kidneys. It's recommended that men should get about 15.5 cups of fluids each day, and women need about 11.5 cups.

Contact your doctor for more information about kidney health and warning signs of kidney disease.

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Important Functions of Protein

Proteins are made up of many building blocks called amino acids and are fundamental for proper body functioning and good health. Recognizing the multifaceted importance of protein underscores the need to incorporate protein sources into your diet to maintain optimal health and function across various bodily systems.

Protein plays a crucial role in the following body functions:

- **Growth and maintenance**—Proteins are instrumental in the regeneration and repair of organ and muscle tissues.
- **Communication**—Some proteins are hormones and act as chemical messengers between cells, tissues and organs.
- **Storage and transportation**—Some proteins transport nutrients (e.g., vitamins and minerals), cholesterol and oxygen throughout your entire body, while others store them.
- **Fluid balance**—Proteins in your blood maintain the fluid balance between your blood and the surrounding tissues.
- **Immune health**—Antibodies and other components in your immune system are proteins that fight infections and disease.

Collectively, these functions make protein one of the most important nutrients for your body. Talk to your doctor if you have any questions about your diet.

Preparing for Tax-filing Season

Tax season is here, so if you haven't done so already, it's time to gather all the appropriate information you need to file your 2023 tax returns. The federal tax deadline is April 15, 2024. Many people elect to file their tax returns electronically; this can be done in various ways, such as using tax preparation software or consulting a tax professional. If you are filing with a paper form, there are certain documents you must be sure to include.

The documentation needed for your tax filing may vary based on your employment status over the past year. It's critical to consult with a tax professional with specific questions about your tax-filing situation.

English Muffin Veggie Pizza

Makes: 4 servings

Ingredients

1 cup broccoli (cooked and chopped)
4 English muffins
1 cup pizza sauce
½ cup part-skim mozzarella cheese (shredded)
4 Tbsp. carrot (shredded)
1 tsp. Parmesan cheese (grated)

Preparations

1. Put the chopped broccoli in a saucepan with water and cook on medium until tender.
2. Drain the water from the saucepan. Let the broccoli cool.
3. Cut the four English muffins in half. Toast all muffin halves.
4. Spoon 2 Tbsp. pizza sauce over each English muffin half.
5. Sprinkle 1 Tbsp. shredded mozzarella cheese on each half.
6. Put 2 Tbsp. broccoli and 1 tsp. shredded carrots on each half.
7. Sprinkle each half with 1 tsp. grated parmesan cheese.
8. Toast the English muffin halves in a toaster oven for 2 minutes until the cheese melts.

Nutritional Information (per serving)

Total calories	220
Total fat	5 g
Protein	11 g
Sodium	576 mg
Carbohydrate	34 g
Dietary fiber	4 g
Saturated fat	2 g
Total sugars	5 g

Source: MyPlate